

Jagannath Rath Yatra

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Around the World

JPS Archives Multi-media Magazine

Vol-04

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Note from Publisher

By the mercy of Sri Sri Guru & Gauranga we are able to bring you another volume of the JPS Archives Multi-media Magazine.

This Special Edition spotlights the Ratha Yatra Festival of Lord Jagannatha, The Lord of the Universe.

Here you will find information about the History of the Ratha Yatra, how it came to the West and the importance of the Festival. There are also many links to videos of Ratha Yatras around the world.

We are grateful to all the devotees who have helped to put this together to increase the joy of the devotees,

Our gratitude extends to those who videoed the footage that we now present to you. The devotees who did the reasearch and compiled the information. And our eternal gratitude to all of the devotees who have helped to increase and improve this festival around the world.

May Lord Jagannatha kindly reveal Himself to all of the devotees and fortunate souls who happen to see, engage in or help with this festival world-wide.

Your humble servants
JPS Archives Media Department

Rath Yatra comes to the West

The first time the Festival of Chariots was performed outside of India was on July 9, 1967 in San Francisco, under the supervision of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada (1896-1977).

Srila Prabhupada, as he is more affectionately known, is the Founder-Acarya of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) and is the tenth generation from Lord Chaitanya. Srila Prabhupada led the Hare Krishna Movement, guiding his disciples to open temples and perform festivals all over the world.



The first Deities of Jagannatha, Baladeva, and Subhadra in ISKCON were discovered in San Francisco in 1967. One of Srila Prabhupada's early disciples, Malati dasi, saw a small figure in an import store, Cost Plus, and brought it to Srila Prabhupada.



When Prabhupada saw the figure, his eyes opened wide. He folded his palms and bowed his head in respect. Then he said, "You have brought Lord Jagannatha, the Lord of the universe. He is Krsna." Srila Prabhupada mentioned that Lord Jagannatha was worshiped with two other Deities: His



brother, Balarama, and sister, Subhadra.

Malati confirmed that there were other, similar figures at the store, and Srila Prabhupada asked her to go and buy them. So she and her husband, Syamasundara, immediately went and brought the other two figures. Placing them with Lord Jagannatha on his desk, Srila Prabhupada told the devotees about Jagannatha's appearance in India thousands of years ago, and how even now He is worshiped in a great temple in Puri and taken in an annual

procession with His brother and sister, each in a huge chariot, in the Ratha-yatra festival.

Prabhupada chanted, Jagannatha-svami nayana-patha-gami bhavatu me: "O Lord of the universe, kindly be visible unto me." And he said that henceforth San Francisco should be called New Jagannatha Puri.

Prabhupada asked if any of the devotees knew how to carve, and Syamasundara volunteered that he did. Srila Prabhupada requested him to carve three-foot-high replicas of the small Jagannatha, Balarama, and Subhadra. Then Syamasundara got three large blocks of wood, and following the sketches and directions that Prabhupada gave him, he carved the first large Deities



of Jagannatha, Baladeva, and Subhadra in the Western world. Then Prabhupada said that the devotees should hold a Ratha-yatra festival.

So, following Prabhupada's instructions, Syamasundara and the others arranged a flatbed truck on which they erected five tall columns, which they covered with cloth to serve as a canopy over the Deities. And then they decorated the "chariot" with flowers. The devotees didn't have many vehicles then, and those they did have were pretty old and dilapidated—and unpredictable in their performance.

At the time of the first Ratha-yatra in San Francisco, Srila Prabhupada was unwell, and the devotees had rented a place for him at nearby Stinson Beach, where he could recuperate. Although Prabhupada himself was unable to attend the festival, the next day the devotees along with the Ratha-yatra truck, the Deities, and some hippies, came to visit him. The devotees were excited and eager to report.

Syamasundara explained that while he was driving the truck up a steep hill, the truck had stalled.



Although he had tried to start the engine, he couldn't. Then the brakes failed, and the truck began to roll backwards down the hill.

Finally he was able to stop it, but when he tried to move forward, the engine stalled and the truck rolled backwards again. Again and again he would get it started, the truck would go forward, the engine would stall, and the truck would roll backwards. The situation seemed hopeless, and the devotees wondered if they would even finish the parade.

But finally by Lord Jagannatha's mercy they were able to get the truck moving forward and finished the parade by driving Lord Jagannatha all the way to see Srila Prabhupada.

Prabhupada's Childhood



Abhay (Srila Prabhupada's name) as a child always wanted to have his own cart and to perform his own Ratha-yatra, and naturally he turned to his father for help.

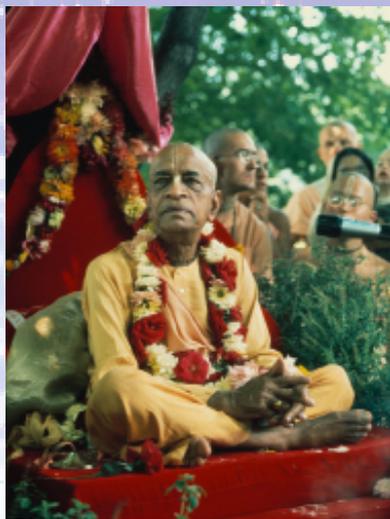
His father, Gour Mohan agreed, but there were difficulties. When he took his son to several carpenter shops, he found that he could not afford to have a cart made. On their way home, Abhay began crying, and an old Bengali woman approached and asked him what the matter was. Gour Mohan explained that the boy wanted a Ratha-yatra cart but they couldn't afford to have one made.

"Oh, I have a cart," the woman said, and she invited Gour Mohan and Abhay to her place and

showed them the cart.

It looked old, but it was still operable, and it was just the right size, about three feet high. Gour Mohan purchased it and helped to restore and decorate it.

Father and son together constructed sixteen supporting columns and placed a canopy on top, resembling as closely as possible the ones on the big carts at Puri. They also attached the traditional wooden horses and driver to the front of the cart. Abhay insisted that it must look authentic.



Gour Mohan bought paints, and Abhay personally painted the cart, copying the Puri originals. His

enthusiasm was great, and he became an insistent organizer of various aspects of the festival.

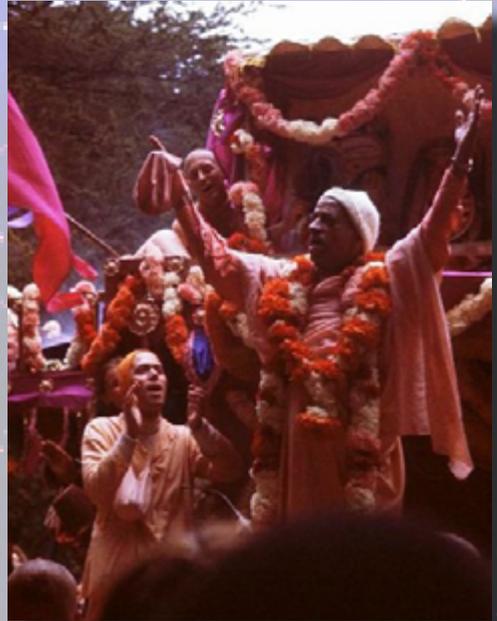
But when he tried making fireworks for the occasion from a book that gave illustrated descriptions of the process, his mother, Rajani, intervened.



Abhay engaged his playmates in helping him, especially his sister Bhavatarini, and he became their natural leader. Responding to his entreaties, amused mothers in the neighborhood agreed to cook special preparations so that he could distribute the prasadam at his Ratha-yatra festival.

Like the festival at Puri, Abhay's Ratha-yatra ran for eight consecutive days. His family members gathered, and the neighborhood children joined in a procession, pulling the cart, playing drums and hand cymbals, and chanting. Wearing a dhoti and no shirt in the heat of summer, Abhay led the children in chanting Hare Krishna.

Abhay never lost his love for Ratha Yatra festival and would later share that love throughout the world with devotees from every continent.



Jayananda Prabhu



One Devotee who really loved Ratha yatra was Jayananda Prabhu, he was the backbone of the Bay Area Ratha-yatra for years, and his experiences at each one are summarized in the 1977 Ratha-yatra edition of Back to Godhead magazine.

Behind the scenes, Jayananda was doing everything in preparation for each festival. He would beg food, flowers and funds, buy materials and build the carts, advertise, arrange for permits, and organize the cooking and serving of prasad.

Although things always went right down to the wire, he would consistently succeed in fulfilling all his plans every year.

After the festival, Jayananda personally brought a prasadam cake or pie to each and every person who had helped in some way or another. Because of his efforts, the devotees in the Bay Area enjoy, to this day, an amazingly harmonious relationship with the city officials.

During the weeks before the festival, Jayananda would sleep at the site where the Ratha carts were under construction. He would rise every day at 4:00 A.M. without fail, even if that meant he was getting only three hours sleep or less.





To keep his crew enlivened, he would cook fantastic prasadam on a tiny gas stove at the site. The preparations were always carefully offered, and each was filled with so much bhakti that the temple devotees would sometimes sneak down to the cart site just to get some.

Jayananda regarded his final Rathayatra, the 1976 festival in New York, to be his “most successful.”

Here is how he described the event in a letter to Keshava Das:

“Somehow I got the good fortune to work on the New York Rathayatra. It was such an auspicious opportunity. Prabhupada was coming, there was finally a first-class center in Manhattan, and somehow Toshan got an O.K. to use Fifth Avenue for the parade route. Jambavan was here and we had a couple of other boys who worked very hard. I was praying

that somehow we could just get the carts finished.

Somehow by Krishna’s grace it worked out. You wouldn’t have believed some of the events. The night before the festival, Saturday, at about 5 or 6 P.M., we were raising Balaram’s dome and it was at the top when a huge gust of wind caught it and blew the whole thing over. The framework was all busted, the tubing twisted, etc. I didn’t see how we could rectify the situation as there was so much to do on the other two carts.

But two devotees who are expert builders vowed they’d somehow get it back together. I had some extra pipes, etc., and they worked all night and by Krishna’s grace all three chariots were at Fifth Ave. and 59th St. by 6:30 A.M. Sunday morning.”

“There’s no place like New York for Rathayatra. The parade was tremendous as was the scene in the park. Even when we pulled the carts back to the construction site people would come out of their apartments and bars and chant Hare Krishna. I guess that occasion was the perfection of my career in Krishna consciousness.”

Fact about Carts

An amazing feature of the Ratha Yatra procession besides the multitude is the incredible size of the Chariots; each Chariot has a name and different dimension as per the deity on it.

Lord Jagannath's Chariot is known as Nandigosh rath, it is 45ft (13.71mts) high and having sixteen wheels. The fabric of the roof is in Red and Yellow and a wheel is placed on the top of the chariot.

Baladeva's chariot is known as Taladvaja rath, the height of this chariot is 44ft (13.2mts), and consists of fourteen wheels. The fabric color of the roof is Red and Green. Tala fruit is placed on top of the chariot.

The third and final Chariot is Lady Subhadra's chariot which is known



as Padmadvaja rath; this is Lady Subhadra's chariot. It is 43ft (12.9mts) in height and consists of twelve wheels. The fabric on the roof is Red and Black.

Most amazing of all is that these chariots have no steering or mechanism but simply pulled by ropes drawn by the multitude that turns up for the event.

The ratha yatra festival has so much significance. This procession is actually The Lord's causeless mercy as he comes out in the streets for everyone to see him irrespective of caste, faith, nationality etc. It is also a day when the lord takes a vacation in midsummer to relax alongside his brother and sister.



Why Rath Yatra ?



The Festival of the Chariots is sometimes referred to as Ratha Yatra, literally meaning Chariot Festival. Ratha Yatra originated 5,000 years ago in India, on the East Coast state of Orissa, in a city called Jagannatha Puri.

The Festival celebrates Lord Krishna's return to Vrindaban and is held annually in the months of June-July to honor Lord Jagannatha, which means Lord of the Universe.

Lord Jagannatha is a particular Deity form of Lord Krishna, fashioned from neem wood and brightly painted.

The residents of Puri have been worshipping this form for many centuries.

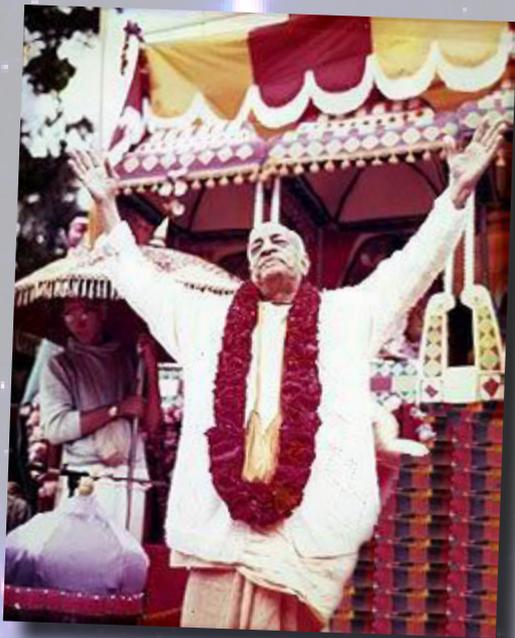
Five hundred years ago, Lord Chaitanya, the most merciful incarnation of Lord Krishna used to daily visit Lord Jagannatha in the temple and see Him in a mood of intense separation, much like Srimati Radharani who was parted from her beloved Krishna most of her days.

For the festivities; there are three chariots, one for each of the three deities; Lord Jagannatha, Lord Balarama and Lady Subhadra.



The canopied chariots are decorated with flowers and balloons and are pulled with long, thick ropes by hundreds of people. The chariots are accompanied by a procession of devotees who are ecstatically dancing and chanting the Lord's Holy Names.

This wonderful festival is not limited to India alone as it now has a worldwide participation with hundreds of thousands of devotees, all this has been made possible by the mercy of HDG AC Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada.



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